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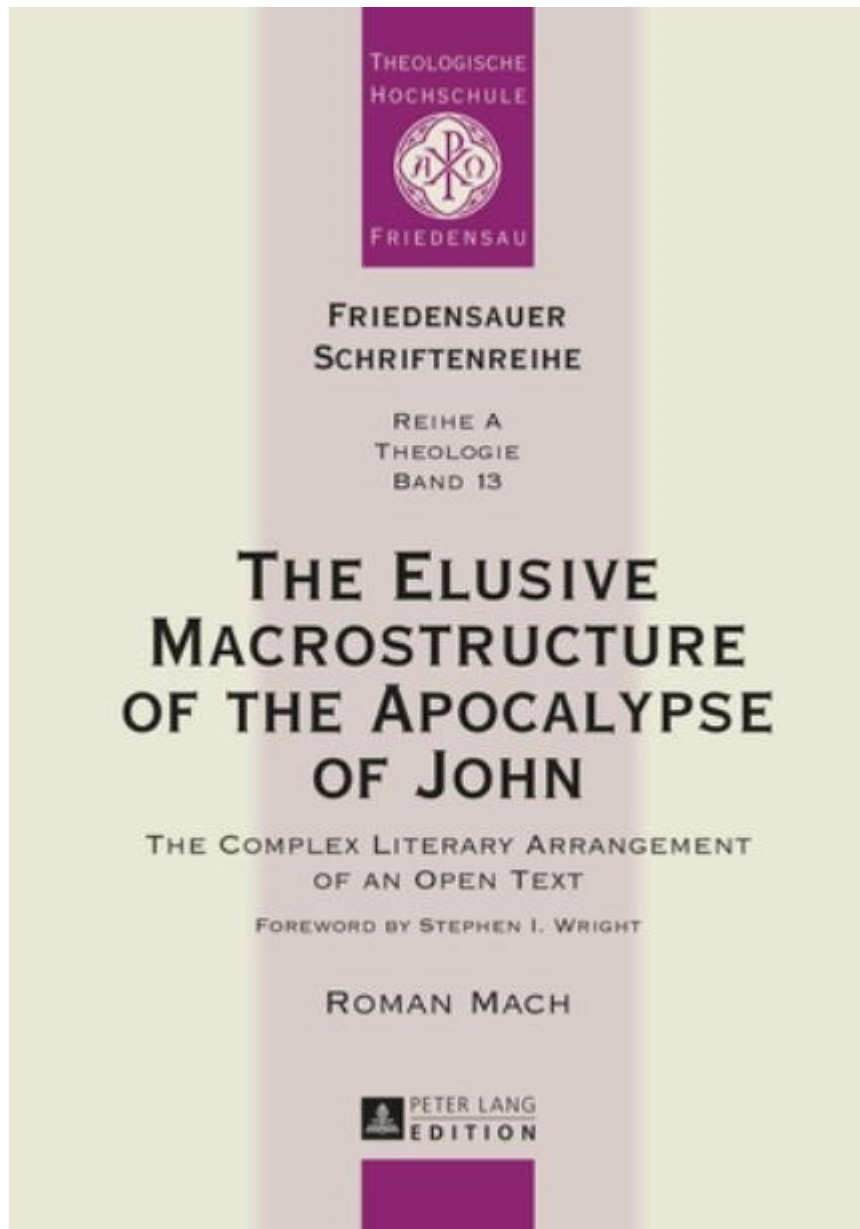
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We congratulate our former PhD student Roman Mach on the recent publication of the results of his PhD research.

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Contents

Editorial	4
Stuart Blythe	
Challenges of Meeting the Other: Baptists Meeting the Education Needs of Hong Kong between 1842 and 1970	5-18
Alex Kammoon To	
Unbreaking the Circle: Conversational Hermeneutics and Intra-Congregational Difference	19-32
Christopher L. Schelin	
Refugees: Exploring Theological and Missiological Foundations	33-47
Rupen Das	

Editorial

This edition of JEBS contains three different but equally interesting articles related to distinct facets of Baptist life and work. These are produced by three of our current IBTSC PhD research students and represent aspects of their study and areas of ministry and mission.

Alex Kammoon To presents a historical account of ‘Baptists meeting the Education Needs of Hong Kong between 1842 and 1970’, with fresh information on a location, situation, and subject which has hitherto received limited treatment. The discussion also highlights areas of tension related to the provision of education as an expression of mission. These areas include the extent to which the churches should cooperate with the State, the extent to which evangelism rather than education should be regarded as the primary activity, and differences in perspective on these issues between the Hong Kong Baptists and the Southern Baptist Mission Board and missionaries.

Christopher Schelin in his article discusses the practice of ‘congregational hermeneutics’ as an expression of Anabaptist and Baptist polity. While sketching the historical antecedents of this practice, its demise, and rediscovery, his particular concern is with ‘how’ such hermeneutics can be facilitated. Schelin argues that the ‘circle process’ is particularly suited to this task as it is an approach which can ‘inoculate against both hierarchicalism and clericalism, on the one hand, and individualist anarchism on the other’. In this discussion of the suitability of the circle method for congregational hermeneutics, connections are made with the idea of a ‘covenant’, the ‘magisterium-hood of all believers’, and the intriguing potential role of one named a ‘librarian’.

In the final article Rupen Das addresses theological and missiological issues related to the present refugee crisis, whilst pointing out that such displacement is not a new phenomenon. He explores why God has a particular concern for such ‘poor’ people. He argues that displacement is a result of structural evil and sin and dehumanises the individuals and families who experience it. God’s response, accordingly, is one of compassion with the concern to redeem them. From this perspective he then offers a number of missiological perspectives, not least in relation to Christian witness particularly to and among Muslim refugees. These perspectives include an emphasis upon the importance of local congregations demonstrating the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

Revd Dr Stuart Blythe (Rector IBTSC Amsterdam)

Challenges of Meeting the Other: Baptists Meeting the Education Needs of Hong Kong between 1842 and 1970

Alex Kammoon To

Introduction

Hong Kong, known as the *Pearl of the Orient*, is situated at the southeast corner of Mainland China. In February 1841, when a group of missionaries visited Hong Kong, they estimated that the population did not exceed 1,500.¹ Those living there were mostly fishermen in a number of coastal villages. To them, Hong Kong was a place to replenish their food and fresh water, and to find a haven, since its harbour provides a natural typhoon shelter.

After 1842, when Hong Kong was ceded to the British as a result of the First Opium War, things began to change. People found Hong Kong a safer and more stable place under British rule. The population surged to over 15,000 in one year.² It then increased to 37,536 in 1853 and by 1854 it had reached 54,072.³ The economy began to grow as the population increased and more families settled there.⁴ Missionaries started to move in, some directly from Europe and North America; others from Macau, a small Portuguese enclave about sixty kilometres west of Hong Kong. The American Baptists, Jehu Lewis Shuck and Issachar Roberts, were among the first missionaries to arrive.⁵

The British government did not have any long-term plan for the welfare of the people there. They saw Hong Kong as a place occupied by a group of refugees from China and did not see Hong Kong as their home. Ruled by a group of politicians from Britain, the refugees did not consider the place as their home either.⁶ Whenever there was unrest in southern China, large numbers of people would flee to Hong Kong. When the trouble in

¹ Lau Siu-lun, *The Foundation of Hong Kong Chinese Churches: The History of Hong Kong Christian Church, 1842-1866* (Hong Kong: Tien Dao Publishing House Ltd., 2003), p.43.

² Lau, *The Foundation of Hong Kong Chinese Churches*, p.45.

³ Lau, *The Foundation of Hong Kong Chinese Churches*, p. 60.

⁴ Lau, *The Foundation of Hong Kong Chinese Churches*, p.26.

⁵ Thomas Dunaway, *Pioneering for Jesus: The Story of Henrietta Shuck* (Nashville, Tennessee: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1930), p.116.

⁶ Kuan Hsin-chi, 'Xianggang Zhengzhi Shehui de Xingcheng' [The Formation of Hong Kong Politics], *Twenty-First Century Review*, Number 41 (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, June 1997), p.153.

China was over, people left Hong Kong and returned to their homeland at once. To these people, Hong Kong was only a lifeboat during the time of adversity. Instead of seeking long-term care from the Hong Kong government, they preferred the government to leave them alone.⁷ As a result, during the first one hundred years of British rule, the Hong Kong Government took a laissez-faire attitude towards the welfare and education of the Hong Kong people.

Early Missionary Efforts

Thirty-five years after Robert Morrison's attempt to enter China and evangelize the Chinese in 1807, the period of British rule was the first time that foreign missionaries were allowed to preach legally and openly on Chinese soil. Missionaries immediately came to Hong Kong with an aim to evangelize the local people and to serve the spiritual needs of British troops.⁸ While they were asked to educate the children of British subjects and officials, the missionaries found that education was an effective means of reaching out to local people.⁹ As a result, missionaries became government agents in providing education to the people of Hong Kong.

Between 1842 and 1858, there were six religious groups involved in educational ministry in Hong Kong: Morrison Education Society; American Baptists; London Missionary Society; American Congregationalists; Anglicans; and Roman Catholics. With government blessing, church schools experienced significant growth. Apart from meeting the needs of the British subjects, the aim of these schools was to spread their faith and to train Christian workers.¹⁰ As Anthony Sweeting says, '[Missionaries] arrived in Hong Kong from various parts of the world and they represented many different Christian denominations. But they shared one common desire -- to evangelize through education.'¹¹

Soon after Lewis and Henrietta Shuck moved to Hong Kong from Macau in early 1842, they devoted themselves to education work. Henrietta wrote to her father on 2 May 1842, saying that they had 'formed a school consisting of twelve boys'.¹² Two years later, in March 1844, she wrote to

⁷ Kuan, 'The Formation of Hong Kong Politics', p.153.

⁸ Henrietta Shuck was a typical example who cared for the spiritual needs of British residents in Hong Kong while spending her efforts to reach out to Chinese.

⁹ Beatrice Leung and Chan Shun-hing, *Changing Church and State Relations in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), p.23.

¹⁰ Clive Whitehead, 'The Concept of British Education Policy in the Colonies 1850-1960', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Vol. 39:2, 2007, pp.161-173.

¹¹ Anthony Sweeting, *Education in Hong Kong: Pre-1841 to 1941 Fact & Opinion* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1990), p.138.

¹² J. B. Jeter, *Memoir of Mrs Henrietta Shuck: The First American Female Missionary to China* (Boston: Gould, Kendall, Lincoln, 1850), p.181.

her sister Susan that she had seventeen children under her teaching.¹³ And in another letter to her sister Isabella, also dated in March 1844, she wrote that they had ‘a school of twenty boys, who speak no English’.¹⁴ In her journal, dated 4 April 1844, she recorded that there were thirty-two children under her care.¹⁵ A month later, in May, the number increased to ‘forty to fifty heathen children under daily instruction’.¹⁶

Lewis Shuck opened the first school in Hong Kong. According to Princeton Hsu, Shuck started a ‘preaching hall’ called *Hongyi Shushu*, which in Chinese means ‘Promoting Skill School’, at Bazaar Street in March 1842, using it as a base for spreading the gospel.¹⁷ The preaching hall later became the Bazaar Baptist Chapel. Two years later, Henrietta Shuck started the first girls’ school which was attached to Queen’s Road Baptist Church.¹⁸ They aimed to use the schools as bases for reaching out to people and saving souls of the little children under their instruction. This can be seen in Henrietta’s letter to Mrs. Keeling concerning the children that she took up: ‘I hope, and humbly pray, that as they grow in years, they may also grow in the knowledge of that adorable savior, who died to redeem them.’¹⁹

Despite the rapid growth of the number of children, the school closed after Henrietta’s death in November 1844. Soon after that, Issachar Roberts and Lewis Shuck left for Guangzhou in 1844 and 1845 respectively. Meanwhile, in 1845 the Baptists in the United States had split into the Southern Baptist Convention and the Northern Baptist Convention, which was later called the American Baptist Convention. Although William Dean, who joined the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU), wished to continue to work in Hong Kong²⁰ and reported that there were two Baptist schools in Kowloon,²¹ Dean also left Hong Kong as ABMU moved its South China headquarters from Hong Kong to Swatow in 1860.²² Due to the lack of support in terms of both money and manpower as a result of the departure of the early missionaries, these small missionary schools were all closed down. Hong Kong was used only as a stepping stone for missionaries to go into China. Once there was an opportunity, they would leave for the

¹³ Jeter, *Memoir of Mrs Henrietta Shuck*, p.201.

¹⁴ Jeter, *Memoir of Mrs Henrietta Shuck*, p.202.

¹⁵ Jeter, *Memoir of Mrs Henrietta Shuck*, p.209.

¹⁶ Dunaway, *Pioneering for Jesus*, p.123.

¹⁷ Lee Chee-kong, *A Study of Hong Kong Christian Churches* (Hong Kong: Toashing Publishing House, 1987), p.23.

¹⁸ Lee, *A Study of Hong Kong Christian Churches*, p.23.

¹⁹ Jeter, *Memoir of Mrs Henrietta Shuck*, p.96.

²⁰ Lee Kam-keung, *Independence and Concerns: A Hundred Year History of Hong Kong Baptist Church 1091-2001* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press HK, 2002), p.21.

²¹ A school in Tokwawan had fifteen boys. See BMM, Vol.28, 1848. A school in Tsimshatsui had about ten students. See BMM, Vol.31, 1851.

²² Albert W. Wardin, ed., *Baptists Around the World* (Nashville, Tennessee: Boardman & Holman Publishers, 1995), p.99.

Mainland, where there was a much bigger gospel field.²³ As a result, early Baptists, when trying to meet the Hong Kong education need, faced their first challenge of the departure of pioneer missionaries.

According to the census of 1865, Hong Kong had a population of 125,504, of which some 2,000 were Americans and Europeans. In 1914, despite an exodus of 60,000 Chinese who feared an attack on the colony during World War I, Hong Kong's population continued to increase from 530,000 in 1916 to 725,000 in 1925, and to 1.6 million by 1941.²⁴ As the population continued to grow, the need for education also increased. Facing this demand, Hong Kong Baptists also participated in education ministry.

Local Chinese Baptist Efforts

Despite the departure of the early missionaries, Baptists' enthusiasm for education did not diminish. Local Hong Kong Baptists continued with the education effort of reaching people. Following the formal establishment of the Hong Kong Baptist Church in 1901 by a group of indigenous Chinese, more than ten Baptist schools were started by the Hong Kong Baptists without foreign missionary assistance between the early 1900s and the early 1960s.²⁵ Those schools were usually small, primitively equipped and attached to churches and out-stations. Some were even set up on the rooftops of resettlement buildings. The objectives of these schools were mainly to provide Christian education to children of church members, to reach out to non-believers, and to train future Christian workers and church leaders.

Unlike the elite schools operated by the Anglicans or the large-scale education plan by the Church of Christ in China, who received financial assistance from their own denominations as well as from the Hong Kong government, Baptist schools started by the local Chinese Baptists were basically unsupported, as all Baptist mission groups were concentrating their work in Mainland China. Despite the enthusiasm of the local Chinese Baptists and the indigenous effort for education and evangelism for youth, almost all of these church schools were eventually closed down during the 1950s and 1960s due to lack of resources, with the exception of a few reputable Baptist schools which had branched out to Hong Kong from

²³ As a result of the Second Opium War in 1860, more treaty ports were opened to foreigners and many missionaries found it an opportunity to move into China.

²⁴ History of Hong Kong (1800s-1930s), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Hong_Kong_\(1800s%E2%80%931930s\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Hong_Kong_(1800s%E2%80%931930s)) (Viewed on 30 Dec. 2015.)

²⁵ The author has gathered a list of these church schools by the Hong Kong Baptists in his paper 'Lam and Education Ministry' which is part of his dissertation to be submitted to IBTSC Amsterdam.

China.²⁶ The Baptists faced the challenge of running schools singlehandedly without any mission or government support.

After the Communists took over China, large numbers of refugees fled to Hong Kong. Between 1949 and 1954, the population increased from 1,860,000 to 2,428,700, more than half a million within five years. Between 1954 and 1959, the population increased from 2,428,700 to 3,023,300, another six hundred thousand people within a period of five years.²⁷ Due to the lack of confidence in China's political situation and the rapid economic growth in Hong Kong, the large number of refugees who had flooded Hong Kong were not going to leave. They had come to stay.²⁸ Facing the imminent education demand, the Hong Kong Governor, Alexander Grantham, hoped to get financial support from the British government. However, with much frustration he told, 'I requested financial assistance from HMG. I begged, I pleaded, I wrote dispatches, I wrote letters, I spoke to officials, I spoke to ministers. But all in vain, we got nothing.'²⁹ Once again the British colonial government turned to churches to take up the challenges of meeting the education needs of society.

While attempting to meet these education needs, Hong Kong Baptists faced many practical challenges, such as the departure of the early missionaries and their own lack of resources; they also faced debates and struggles over seeking missionary support; over the relationship between church and state; and over the priority of education versus direct evangelism.

Seeking Missionary Support

As the population increased, the number of unschooled children registered with the government rose to 23,000 in 1950.³⁰ Facing the increasing education demand, the Hong Kong Baptists resorted to missionaries for assistance. After the Communists took over China in 1949, along with the exodus of large numbers of refugees, many missionaries were forced to leave the country.³¹ Baker Cauthen, General Secretary of the Southern Baptist Mission Board (Far East), held a meeting in Hong Kong with Southern Baptist missionaries in July 1950, discussing how to adjust the mission strategy. Among the two hundred Southern Baptist missionaries who left

²⁶ The two famous Baptist schools were Pui Ching Middle School and Pooi To Girls' Schools which originated in China and branched out to Hong Kong in 1933 and 1938 respectively.

²⁷ Hong Kong Statistics 1947-1967, (Hong Kong: Census & Statistics Department, 1969), p.14.

²⁸ Kuan Hsin-chi, *The Formation of Hong Kong Politics*, p.154.

²⁹ Alexander Grantham, *Via Ports: From Hong Kong to Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1965; reprint 2012), p.158. HMG denotes Her Majesty's Government.

³⁰ Wong Yin-lei, *A History of the Hong Kong Baptist University* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist University, 1996), p.3.

³¹ (author unknown), *Making Tomorrow: The Story of the One Hundred and Fifty-Ninth Year of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1950-1951* (London: Baptist Missionary Society, 1952), p.29.

China, over three quarters of them decided to stay in Asia to continue reaching out to places like Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Japan, and Korea. Although Hong Kong was selected as the centre of the new mission fields, only seven missionaries stayed there.³²

While most missionaries were deciding where to go, Hong Kong Baptist leaders, in particular Lam Chi-fung who was the President of the Hong Kong Baptist Convention, took the opportunity to seek help from the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Lam asked the Board 'to send as many of these missionaries as possible to Hong Kong, where their knowledge of China and their experience would be of greater benefit than if they returned home'.³³ As a result of the earnest request by the Hong Kong Baptists, the Southern Baptists were convinced that Hong Kong was the eye of the free world into China proper, and the city was China's contact with the free world.³⁴ Many missionaries were sent to Hong Kong.

By 1969 there were ninety-three Southern Baptist missionaries in the territory.³⁵ If missionaries from other Baptist mission groups were included, there were about one hundred.³⁶ Among the fifty or so foreign mission groups in Hong Kong, the Southern Baptist Mission had the largest number of missionaries and was the strongest Christian group in the territory.³⁷ The new missionary force provided personnel in helping to plant churches, set up new schools, provide school teachers and administrators, and train church workers. Through their connections and influence, foreign mission boards of their respective conventions and their home churches also provided financial support to the Hong Kong ministry.

Hong Kong Baptist College, known as the world's only Chinese Baptist tertiary education institution, was established in 1956. During the first five years, the college received US\$195,000 from the Foreign Mission Board toward the building programme, which included US\$55,000 from David Carver, \$50,000 from William Fleming of Fort Worth, \$30,000 from

³² Princeton Hsu, ed., *A History of Church Baptist Churches: Volume II, Hong Kong and Macao Area* (Hong Kong: Baptist Press, 1971), p.215. Malaysia was the largest Chinese mission field overseas since the missionaries were forced to leave China. See Paul Yat-keung Wong, 'The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong' (PhD dissertation, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1974), p.205.

³³ Shan-ching Gao, *A Memoir of David Lam* (Hong Kong: Ming Pao Press, 1995), p.17. Lam was the President of the Hong Kong Baptist Convention between 1941 and 1970, the longest serving president of the Convention.

³⁴ *Missionary Herald* (Baptist Missionary Society, April 1955), p.54.

³⁵ Hsu, *A History of Church Baptist Churches: Volume II*, pp.215~218. Baker J. Cauthen and Frank K. Means, *Advance to Bold Mission Thrust: A History of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission* (Virginia: Foreign Mission Board of Southern Baptist Convention, 1981), p.110.

³⁶ Wong, 'The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong', p.294.

³⁷ Cauthen, *Advance to Bold Mission Thrust*, p.110.

Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, and a few contributions of \$5,000.³⁸ Other than the tuition income, the money from the Foreign Mission Board became the highest income source of the college for the first twelve years of its operation, more than ten times the amount provided by the local Hong Kong denominational body.³⁹

In the area of personnel, Lam took the initiative to write to Maurice Anderson, Chairman of Hong Kong-Macao Baptist Mission, seeking missionary personnel to assist in the college. The personnel requested included: 'a person with a PhD degree in English, or a M.A. degree and administrative experience, to help as Head of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature'; and 'a person with a higher degree who is qualified to teach modern mathematics'.⁴⁰ Lam also wrote to Rev. Dick Lusk, Mission Chairman of Hong Kong-Macao Baptist Mission, to request more journeymen and missionary personnel to teach and serve at the various departments of the College in areas including history, civil engineering, accounting, communication, social work, and admission and registrar's office.⁴¹ As a result, among the three full-time lecturers and twenty teachers in the first school year, there were eleven westerners who served without salary.⁴²

Winston Crawley, Vice-President of Planning of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, believed the rapid growth of Baptist work during this period was a result of partnership between the Southern Baptist missionaries and the Baptist leaders of Hong Kong.⁴³ Hong Kong Baptists experienced a golden age of tremendous growth between 1950 and 1970.

Debates over Seeking Missionary Support

Behind the beautiful picture of east-west cooperation, the Hong Kong Baptists faced challenges with regard to seeking missionary support. There were the usual difficulties for two different cultural groups working together. One was the language barrier. Maurice Anderson succinctly says, '[Despite that] each could speak in some fashion the language of the other. In technical conversation neither understood the other well enough to get fine meanings

³⁸ 'Letter to Dr. David Carver from Maurice Anderson, dated Feb 22, 1961.'

³⁹ Maurice Anderson, *The Survival Strategies of A Complex Organization* (Louisiana, 1972. Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 72-87130), p.107.

⁴⁰ 'Letter to Dr. Maurice Anderson, Chairman of Hong Kong-Macao Baptist Mission, from Lam Chi-fung, dated June, 14, 1961.'

⁴¹ 'Letter to Rev. Dick Lusk, Mission Chairman, Hong Kong-Macao Baptist Mission, from Lam Chi-fung, dated May 30, 1970.'

⁴² Anderson, *The Survival Strategies of A Complex Organization*, p.60.

⁴³ Winston Crawley, *Partners Across the Pacific: China and Southern Baptists: Into the Second Century* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1996), p.98.

across.’⁴⁴ He further states, ‘Although the missionaries involved had lived and worked in China, and in Hong Kong, their basic socialization was quite alien to that of their Chinese counterparts.’⁴⁵ It was noted that conflict between missionaries and locals was obvious, particularly in institutions such as the Baptist College and the Seminary.⁴⁶

Another acute challenge faced was the question of indigenization of the Hong Kong Baptists. Some local Baptist leaders considered that the arrival of Baptist missionaries had eroded the indigenous effort of the Hong Kong Baptists.⁴⁷ Since the departure of the early missionaries, local Hong Kong Baptists had undertaken the mission work singlehandedly, without aid from any foreign mission agency.⁴⁸ Before the return of the missionaries, Hong Kong Baptists had built a relatively strong denomination, with four Baptist churches and a number of chapels and outstations, on their own.⁴⁹ Missionaries were sent to various places to help set up churches and to evangelize the local Chinese.

Hong Kong pastors and lay leaders were sent to different parts of south-east Asia, including southern China, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines and Taiwan.⁵⁰ The mission work was extended even to Tanzania in Africa.⁵¹ Apart from these places, Chinese Baptists in Canada, USA and New Zealand were also greatly strengthened by the witness of Hong Kong Baptists. The Hong Kong Baptist mission was seen as a lighthouse shining upon Chinese Baptist missions over the whole world.⁵² Rev. Paul Wong saw that Hong Kong Baptists, being the largest in membership and longest in history, must sustain their indigenous efforts in order to serve the Chinese all over the world.⁵³

Wong maintained that after twenty years of erosion since the return of western missions in the 1950s, indigenous effort needed to be greatly restored.⁵⁴ He quoted a famous columnist of *Christian Weekly* in Hong Kong who said, ‘Hong Kong does not need any more missionaries. Rather, Hong Kong should send missionaries overseas.’ The columnist further expressed that, instead of spending the money on missionaries for their family, travel,

⁴⁴ Anderson, *The Survival Strategies of A Complex Organization*, p.65.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *The Survival Strategies of A Complex Organization*, p. 64.

⁴⁶ Wong, ‘The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong’, p.234.

⁴⁷ Wong, ‘The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong’, p.229.

⁴⁸ Wong, ‘The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong’, p.89.

⁴⁹ *Hong Kong Baptist Churches Association Annual 1969* records that there were 6 churches and 2 chapels with 4,317 members in 1948.

⁵⁰ Wong, ‘The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong’, pp.203~225. Also see *History of Hong Kong Baptist Church* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist Church, 1991), p.8.

⁵¹ *History of Hong Kong Baptist Church*, p.9.

⁵² Wong, ‘The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong’, p.203.

⁵³ Wong, ‘The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong’, p.228.

⁵⁴ Wong, ‘The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong’, pp.228~229.

and furlough expenses, mission groups should appropriate the same amount of money for Hong Kong development rather than sending personnel.⁵⁵ Thus Hong Kong Baptists faced the challenge of eroding the process of indigenization when calling foreign missionaries to help in education ministry.

Church and State Relationship

Separation of church and state is always considered a core axiom of Baptist faith. In the history of Baptist involvement in Hong Kong education, there was always a question of how to draw the line of church and state relationship in such a way that the core belief was not infringed. Should Baptist schools seek and accept government assistance?

Past experience

When Shuck arrived in Hong Kong in 1842, he wrote to Sir Henry Pottinger, the first Governor of Hong Kong, to get land to build a chapel.⁵⁶ The Governor generously granted the land and subscribed fifty dollars toward the completion of the chapel.⁵⁷ Since then, Hong Kong Baptists constantly received supports from the government in education work.

- In 1922, the girls' school in the new Aberdeen Baptist Chapel received from the government a free grant of HK\$240 every year.⁵⁸
- In 1952, Pooi To Girls' School received from the Hong Kong government a free grant of land of 74,130 square feet and an interest free loan for the new school building on Inverness Road. When celebrating its 70th anniversary in 1958, the school sought another government loan for an expansion project.⁵⁹
- In 1955, Henrietta Secondary School received from the Hong Kong government a piece of land of over 12,000 square feet on Park Road and a ten-year interest free loan of HK\$200,000 for its new school building.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Wong, 'The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong', p.287.

⁵⁶ Jeter, *Memoir of Mrs Henrietta Shuck*, p.179

⁵⁷ Dunaway, *Pioneering for Jesus*, p.117.

⁵⁸ Lau Yuet-sing, *Xianggang Jidujiaohui Shi [History of Hong Kong Churches]*. 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist Church, 1996), p.63. See also Lau Yuet-sing, *Lainggang Jinxinhui Shilue [A Brief History of Guangdong and Guangxi Baptist Churches]*. Reprint, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist Church, 1997), p.66.

⁵⁹ Hsu, *A History of Chinese Baptist Churches, Vol. II*, p.164.

⁶⁰ *School History of Henrietta Secondary School*, Hong Kong Baptist Church.

- In 1957, with the help of Sir Alexander Grantham, Hong Kong Baptist College was granted land of over 170,000 square feet as its permanent school site.⁶¹

Hong Kong Baptists indeed had a long history of getting assistance from the government for education work.

Struggles over Church and State Relationship

The precise interpretation and practice of separation of church and state did not much concern the Hong Kong Baptists in the early days. However, since the return of the Southern Baptist missionaries, the issue became relevant. Although many Baptists around the world were not as strict as the Southern Baptists, the Hong Kong Baptists, who received so much funding from them, were cautious about how to handle it. Many local Baptist pastors also considered that accepting government subsidies for running schools was regarded as a breach of church-state separation.⁶² The issue was brought up in the Annual General Meeting of the Hong Kong Baptist Convention in 1965. Some opposed the idea of accepting government support, based on arguments including:

- It is against the Bible teaching of ‘to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s’;
- It is against the principle of separation of church and state;
- Taking government subsidies may result in schools being taken over by the government;
- The Hong Kong Macau Mission Board would refuse to fund subsidies requested by any school that takes government subsidies.

Those who were in favour of accepting government support argued that:

- More schools can be established for evangelism;
- It would not affect the independence of school administration;
- Lowering the tuition fee can result in more education opportunities;
- It does not breach the principle of separation of church and state.⁶³

The conclusion of the subcommittee was to accept government subsidies to set up more schools, as long as school independence could be maintained.

⁶¹ Wong, *A History of the Hong Kong Baptist University*, p.78.

⁶² Vincent Lau, ‘From Periphery to Partnership: A Critical Analysis of the Relationship of Baptists in Hong Kong with the Colonial Government in the Post-World War II Era’ (Doctor of Philosophy thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2005), p.118.

⁶³ ‘Minutes of A Discussion Meeting on Education Development of the Hong Kong Baptist Convention held on June 11, 1966.’

The subcommittee stated that accepting a free grant of land and building fund subsidy has nothing to do with government interference, since the government has the right to interfere whenever it desires; for example, Pooi To had received a subsidy before and the government never interferes with the school administration.⁶⁴

A year later, in 1966, a meeting was held on 11 June to discuss the future development of education ministry. The people who attended included committee members of Higher, Middle and Lower Education Departments, denominational leaders, and principals of Baptist schools. Of the sixty-four people who were present in the meeting, forty-five supported the acceptance of subsidy, six were against, four had no opinion and nine gave up.⁶⁵

Lam wrote to Winston Crawley in 1958 to seek the opinion of the Southern Baptists. He explained to Crawley that the government, who needed schools, was willing to supply money and tuition subsidy to school operators on a student basis, and most of the Hong Kong Baptist churches were interested in taking the government offer. In fact, many church groups in Hong Kong were enjoying this kind of government help and thereby had an opportunity to offer religious instruction to the students in addition to general education. Lam further expressed,

Many of our own young people are attending schools operated by Methodists, Anglicans, other Protestant groups, and the Catholics who have a great advantage over us, unless we are able to receive some source of assistance so as to lower our fees and furnish equipment and buildings comparable to those of other similar church schools.⁶⁶

The response from the Southern Baptists was less positive. Crawley indicated that a grant of land in Hong Kong would likely cause no problem as land was basically controlled by the government, and interest-free loans would be a borderline issue.⁶⁷ Rev. Ronald Fuller clearly indicated that the Southern Baptist missionaries in Hong Kong opposed receiving government subsidy.⁶⁸

Almost at the same time as the meeting was being held, Paul Wong wrote an article on Church and State Relationship in the June 1966 Issue of the *Baptist Monthly*. He questioned whether Baptists who advocate spiritual strength can accept worldly strength to operate things in God's kingdom.

⁶⁴ *Hong Kong Baptist Monthly*, 5 May 1965.

⁶⁵ 'Minutes of A Discussion Meeting on Education Development of the Hong Kong Baptist Convention held on June 11, 1966.'

⁶⁶ 'Letter to Dr. Winston Crawley, Vice-President for Planning, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, from Lam Chi-fung, dated June 10, 1958.'

⁶⁷ Lau, 'From Periphery to Partnership' p.110.

⁶⁸ Lau, 'From Periphery to Partnership', p.111.

Would God be pleased to see us using worldly strength to serve Him? Should we give up our rights and accept being controlled by others?⁶⁹

Dr. George Wilson, a veteran Southern Baptist missionary of Hong Kong and the former President of Hong Kong Baptist Seminary, said as long as there is no direct money subsidy received, it is fine to obtain land and interest free loans from the government.⁷⁰ Dr. Vincent Lau, Assistant Professor of Ethics at Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, believed that Hong Kong Baptists should run private schools which receive no subsidy from the government.⁷¹ The debate goes on. However, it was a genuine challenge to the Hong Kong Baptists whether to accept government assistance for Baptist schools.

Education and Direct Evangelism: an Ongoing Debate

Education is considered as one of the core traditions of Baptists, particularly of the Chinese Baptists.⁷² However, Baptists in USA debated for years the priority of education versus direct evangelism. Those who favoured education felt that ‘it would prepare people for the gospel and provide trained lay and ministerial leadership needed for strong indigenous churches’.⁷³ Others, however, warned that ‘education would absorb too large a percentage of missionary funds and personnel’ and believed that ‘direct evangelism was more fruitful’ in many cases.⁷⁴

The same debate took place concerning Hong Kong Baptist College. In a letter from David Carver to Dr. Holmer G. Lindsay, President of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, dated 3 January 1963, Carver wrote:

I have felt for some time that Dr. Cauthen and Dr. Crawley did not share my feeling of the importance of the College, both as an opportunity to develop leadership and as an evangelistic agency... Now the main purpose of this letter is to let you know that I have recently been waging a battle to have the Board do more for the College.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Paul Wong, ‘Church and State Relationship’, *Baptist Monthly*, June 15, 1966, Hong Kong Baptist Convention.

⁷⁰ George Wilson, Former President of Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, interview by author, April 15, 2014, Hong Kong.

⁷¹ Lau, ‘From Periphery to Partnership’, p.317.

⁷² Samuel Tang, ‘Maintain the Baptist Tradition - Proud of the Baptists,’ in *Jinxinhui Zaihua Yibai Wushi Zhounian Jinian Tekan* [Baptists in China, 150th Anniversary Special Memorial Issue] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist Convention, 1986), p.66.

⁷³ Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1987), p.396.

⁷⁴ McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, p.396.

⁷⁵ ‘Letter to Dr. Holmer G. Lindsay, President of Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, from Dr. David Carver, dated January 3, 1963.’

Southern Baptist missionaries were divided with regard to the founding of Hong Kong Baptist College. Maurice Anderson revealed that some missionary trustees of the college had opposed the founding of the college, both privately and in the Mission.⁷⁶ Questions were raised, such as: 'To what extent would the college project affect adversely provision of funds for building of churches?'⁷⁷

Local Baptist leaders in Hong Kong also had questioned whether so much resource should be spent on education. Princeton Hsu argued that it would not be possible for church schools to compete with government schools in terms of finances and facilities. If tuition fees were raised, they would become schools for the rich. He therefore questioned whether churches should spend resources on running schools.⁷⁸

Paul Wong believed that 'many good opportunities to help build better churches were lost in the early part of the 1960s' due to the Baptist Association which 'stressed the development of the institutions instead of the churches'.⁷⁹ However, according to Wong's survey among Hong Kong Baptist workers on whether a local church should also have social service besides preaching the gospel, 74.6% supported this and only 13.4% disagreed.⁸⁰ Therefore we can see that there were diverse opinions with regard to the priority of education over direct evangelism.

Conclusion

Once the American Baptist missionaries arrived in Hong Kong in 1842 and discovered education as an effective means to reach people and spread the gospel, they began to be involved in setting up schools in the territory. The early schools closed down due to the lack of resources after the missionaries had departed for Mainland China. The local Chinese Baptists took over the role to operate a number of church schools during the first half of the twentieth century. However, those schools with primitive setup and without outside assistance were unable to survive and eventually had to close down.

Circumstances in Hong Kong underwent a drastic change after 1949, when large numbers of refugees fled to Hong Kong and foreign missionaries were forced to leave China. Hong Kong faced a sudden surge of educational

⁷⁶ Anderson, *The Survival Strategies of A Complex Organization*, p.64.

⁷⁷ Anderson, *The Survival Strategies of A Complex Organization*, p.49.

⁷⁸ Princeton Hsu, 'Church and General Education', *Baptist Monthly*, July 15, 1966, Hong Kong Baptist Convention.

⁷⁹ Wong, 'The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong', p.240. Wong had doubts whether the Convention should spend so much resource on institutions such as the Hong Kong Baptist College and Hong Kong Baptist Hospital.

⁸⁰ Wong, 'The History of Baptist Missions in Hong Kong', p.270.

need. To respond to the demand, the Hong Kong Baptists invited foreign missionaries to help and sought government assistance.

With the help of foreign missionaries and assistance from the government, Hong Kong Baptists had a large and strong programme of secondary and post-secondary education during the period between 1950 and 1970.⁸¹ By 1970, the Baptists had about a dozen primary schools and kindergartens, three large secondary schools, and a college. The total enrolment was over 12,600 students.⁸² Among all the Christian groups in Hong Kong, only the Baptists had a post-secondary school in the territory.⁸³

Although the Hong Kong Baptists had successfully established a large education empire in the territory, they faced various challenges when trying to meet the educational need. These challenges included the debate over calling for western missionary assistance versus indigenization; the struggle regarding accepting government support versus separation of church and state; and the priority of education versus direct evangelism. These challenges continue to exist today. As time goes by and circumstances change, they may become more acute or less of a concern to the Hong Kong Baptists.

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⁸¹ Manfred Berndt, 'The Diakonia (Servant) Function of the Church in Hong Kong' (Doctor of Sacred Theology thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1970), p.307.

⁸² *Hong Kong Baptist Churches Association Annual 1970*.

⁸³ Berndt, 'The Diakonia (Servant) Function of the Church in Hong Kong', p.390. Hong Kong Baptist College was renamed Hong Kong Baptist University in 1994.

Unbreaking the Circle: Conversational Hermeneutics and Intra-Congregational Difference

Christopher L. Schelin

Introduction

Christian churches, although they unite participants in common worship and mission, are inevitably characterized by an internal diversity of convictions. Members openly or quietly affirm viewpoints in contradiction to each other, to predominant community values, or to official statements of belief, yet recognition and exploration of this immediate otherness is generally avoided. Against such reticence, the Free Church tradition normatively affirms the equal responsibility of believers to govern a congregation by discerning the mind of Christ, and this conviction necessitates encounters with difference in dialogical process. Nevertheless, the active practice of tending to intra-communal otherness remains a largely dormant potential. This absence contrasts with the employment of ‘congregational hermeneutics’ in the early histories of the Anabaptists and Baptists. Although openness to the robust interplay of opinions quickly subsided, contemporary theologians have reclaimed collective Scriptural interpretation as a distinctive marker of these movements. But this Free Church *ressourcement* has not advanced to the point of concrete suggestions for the renewal of hermeneutical deliberation in congregations.

This paper looks beyond specifically Christian disciplines to consider an intentional group-conversation method that has come into prominence in recent decades. Known by names such as the ‘circle process’ or ‘talking circles,’ the model has been applied in a range of formal and informal settings. After defining the basic characteristics of these gathered circles as they are shared across particular expressions, I will propose that the realisation of congregational hermeneutics via the circle process, labelled ‘conversational hermeneutics’, should be considered as a vehicle for restoring the dialogical character of churches. The exercise of conversational hermeneutics cultivates the hospitable reception of otherness in the commitment to hear the God of Scripture speak through the mediation of diverse voices.

The Congregational Hermeneutics of the Free Church

At the outset of both traditions, gathered communities among the Anabaptists of continental Europe and the Baptists in England and America practised what has been called ‘congregational hermeneutics’.¹ The essential proposition of this practice is the claim that ‘a text is best understood in a congregation’.² The Reformation doctrine of illumination by the Holy Spirit is retained, but a local gathering of receptive Christian believers becomes the dominant or even exclusive locus for interpretation. The radical notion of the hermeneutical community stems from the early Martin Luther’s teaching on the priesthood of believers. It was he who asserted the interpretive significance of universal priesthood, declaring that every Christian holds the capacity to judge between true and false teaching.³

The Anabaptists were inspired directly by Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli who, like Luther, initially declared that every believer plays a part in the meaningful reading of Scripture.⁴ He acknowledged disagreement would be a legitimate aspect of the process and formalised a procedure for disputation, which he used to defend his reforms from Roman Catholic opposition. His confrontation with proto-Anabaptists redirected Zwingli to vest authority in civic and religious elites.⁵ But Swiss Brethren co-founders Conrad Grebel and Felix Mantz had previously participated in the Reformer’s Bible studies where the contributions of all were welcome, and their movement would sustain the original vision.⁶ Zwingli’s reformation also inspired the Puritan practice of ‘prophesying’, or meetings of ‘godly’ preachers and laity to hear multiple sermons and discuss matters of doctrine and ethics.⁷ While the original Puritan intention was the training of clergy, their Baptist inheritors more readily turned interpretation and proclamation into a responsibility of the whole people.

A few key principles define the hermeneutical community as practised by the Reformation’s radicals. First, the collective reading of Scripture was placed at the heart of congregational gatherings. For early Anabaptists and

¹ Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2000), *passim*.

² John Howard Yoder, ‘The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists’, *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* Vol 41:4 (1967), p.301.

³ Martin Luther, ‘An Appeal to the Ruling Class of German Nationality as to the Amelioration of the State of Christendom’, in Bertam Lee Woolf, ed. and trans., *Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, Volume 1: The Basis of the Protestant Reformation* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), pp. 112-115, 119-121.

⁴ Murray, p.173.

⁵ John Howard Yoder, ‘The Evolution of The Zwinglian Reformation’, *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* Vol 43:1 (1969), *passim*.

⁶ Murray, p.173.

⁷ Joanne J. Jung, *Godly Conversation: Rediscovering the Puritan Practice of Conference* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), pp.32-36; Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014), pp.292ff.

Baptists, the Spirit's sanctifying ministry was mediated not through sacraments or liturgy but through the written Word. Because the established authorities of creeds and ecclesial hierarchies had been rejected as at least potentially and often actually prone to error, Scripture needed to be read afresh in assemblies humbly submitting to God's revealed will.

Second, this stance required not merely a passive spirit of openness, but an active encouragement that all present collaborate in the interpretive enterprise. In the words of one report from the Anabaptist church in Nikolsburg,⁸ 'When they come together they teach each other the divine Word and one asks the others: how do you understand this saying?'⁹ One Swiss Brethren tract commanded that any person who felt he had received a message of edification must speak up during worship.¹⁰

Third, although both Free Church traditions saw pastors and elders as essential to the good order of congregations, anti-clerical and egalitarian scruples entailed a facilitative rather than a directive model of leadership.¹¹ John Clarke, founder of the second Baptist church in the American colonies, was never himself ordained and he actively encouraged other men to preach in worship.¹² His successor, Obadiah Holmes, declared the pastor to be an imperfect instrument and placed greater emphasis on the ministry of the church as a whole.¹³ According to Stuart Murray, Anabaptist leaders frequently invited adherents to test the accuracy of their teaching by examining Scripture themselves.¹⁴

Finally, the belief that discernment arises through group deliberation creates the space for lively disagreement. Obbe Philips, a Dutch Anabaptist founder who later renounced the movement, complained in his autobiography about the 'great wrangling and dissension' that occurred as churches debated biblical teaching.¹⁵ Similarly, vigorous discussion occurred in the services of the Bell Alley Church in London, led by the Baptist Thomas Lambe. Debate among the gathering followed, and sometimes interrupted, the multiple sermons preached during worship.¹⁶

⁸ Present-day Mikulov in the Czech Republic.

⁹ Murray, p.161.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.160.

¹¹ Ibid., p.163; Walter B. Shurden, *Not an Easy Journey: Some Transitions in Baptist Life* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2005), pp.64-68.

¹² Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *John Clarke and His Legacies: Religion and Law in Colonial Rhode Island 1638-1750*. Sydney V. James, ed. (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), p.22.

¹³ Shurden, p.69.

¹⁴ Murray, p.166.

¹⁵ Quoted in ibid., p.162.

¹⁶ Christopher J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2004), p.48.

John Clarke is also known to have tolerated doctrinal diversity and encouraged vigorous discussion in church meetings.¹⁷

What were the modalities in which congregational hermeneutics was practised? Murray notes that Anabaptist writings contain no lengthy explanations of the process, so we may only infer from scattered references.¹⁸ One example is found in the first Anabaptist church manual, *The Swiss Order* of 1527. The *Order* prescribes a posture of silent receptivity followed by extemporaneous proclamation in worship. A passage of Scripture is read aloud and then someone ‘to whom God has given the best understanding’ expounds on the text.¹⁹ The manual does not specify criteria to determine which person possesses the greatest comprehension in a given meeting; it is likely a matter of personal discernment to speak. Other Anabaptist writings outline orders of service in which congregants take turns reading, preaching, and discussing Scripture texts.²⁰

Puritan prophesying evolved into regular Sunday worship as early Baptists conducted lengthy services featuring multiple preachers. The community of John Smyth in Amsterdam divided its Sunday gatherings into two sections. The first part featured the reading of a biblical selection followed by open discussion to ascertain its meaning. Then, based on Smyth’s strict distinction between carnal elements and spiritual worship, all books were laid aside as members awaited divine inspiration. As many as five persons would then preach from memory on the previously-read passage, each adding his understanding of its significance as he felt God enabled him.²¹ Thomas Lambe’s church, as already noted, inverted this pattern so that discussion followed the sermon series. The preachers were selected by the congregation, with disagreements settled by majority vote.²² John Clarke’s church, meanwhile, expressed the growing preference for structure and order in worship, especially among those who would come to be identified as Particular Baptists. He preserved uninterrupted preaching for formal worship gatherings and limited open conversation to separate church meetings.²³

These forms of congregational hermeneutics were typical of the experimentalism that characterizes new religious movements, and in the absence of intentional theological reflection their decline was inevitable. Clerical prerogatives never entirely disappeared; Murray points out that even the most egalitarian Anabaptist groups circumscribed collective

¹⁷ Bozeman, p.22, pp.39ff.

¹⁸ Murray, p.157.

¹⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.161.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.160, 162.

²¹ Ellis, pp.46ff.

²² *Ibid.*, p.48.

²³ Bozeman, p.25.

interpretation of Scripture by granting deference to official leadership.²⁴ Where clericalism was absent, it re-emerged rapidly and Anabaptists increasingly relied on interpretations established by precedent and promulgated by ordained pastors.²⁵ Baptists experienced similar shifts toward elevating the clergy as authoritative teachers of biblical truth.²⁶ Educated and influential leaders among them also pressed for an orderly polity, thereby earning external respectability in place of disdain for undermining social hierarchies.²⁷

In recent decades, scholars in both traditions have revisited congregational hermeneutics and named the practice as a normative element of Free Church ecclesiology. A central figure of this recovery for Mennonites was John Howard Yoder, who treated the topic on several occasions. His article, 'The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists', depicts the practice as an answer to the question of the locus of theological authority. The Anabaptist innovation, being actually the logical outworking of the Reformers' teaching, placed the power of discerning God's will not in the hands of approved clergy, educated scholars, or established tradition, but the common people gathering in discernment.²⁸ Writing later in 'The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood', Yoder conjoins communal interpretation and discipline as complementary aspects of the radical Protestant approach to practical moral reasoning.²⁹ This method for determining and disseminating ethical conclusions presents a 'third way' alternative to individualism or authoritarianism by establishing a collective authority in which persons voluntarily participate.³⁰ The dialogical character of this process entails the constructive wrestling with differences as various views of what is good and proper come into conflict and, ideally, are reconciled in a shared vision of obedience.³¹

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the late-twentieth-century battle for the control of the Southern Baptist Convention, some Baptists in America began seeking an ecclesial vision free from fundamentalist conformism or liberal autonomous individualism. This hope was expressed in *The Baptist Manifesto*, first appearing in *Baptists Today* in 1997 with the signatures of

²⁴ Murray, p.160.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.164ff.

²⁶ E.g., the writings of seventeenth-century English Baptist pastor-theologian John Gill, in Shurden, pp.70ff.

²⁷ Stephen Wright, *The Early English Baptists, 1603-1649* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2006), pp.120ff.

²⁸ Yoder, 'The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists', pp.300-302, 305.

²⁹ John Howard Yoder, 'The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood: A Protestant Perspective on Practical Moral Reasoning', *Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol 10:1 (1982), *passim*.

³⁰ Ibid., p.48.

³¹ Ibid., pp.50ff.

fifty-five pastors and scholars.³² The initial proposal in their platform reads, 'We affirm Bible Study in reading communities rather than relying on private interpretation or supposed "scientific" objectivity.' Acknowledging that God's truth sets persons free, the signatories declare that such freedom manifests through the communal reading of Scripture. Congregational hermeneutics should be practised in an open and orderly manner, trusting that the Holy Spirit guides discernment when 'every voice is heard and weighed'. The *Manifesto* parallels Yoder's account of Anabaptist hermeneutics in its rejection of the antitheses of external authority and private judgment and in the centring of interpretation in gathered communities of faith.

Echoing Yoder, Baptist theologian Steven Harmon considers congregational hermeneutics a Free Church contribution to ecumenical dialogue. A critical question in the discussions between Christian traditions is the location and extent of the teaching authority that determines appropriate faith and practice. Employing Roman Catholic terminology, Harmon calls this the 'unavoidable problem of magisterium'.³³ The traditional concept of magisterium is hierarchical: by virtue of their office, hierarchs judge what coheres within the boundaries of the faith.³⁴ The classical Protestantism of the great Reformers retains the distinction between teachers and taught but places trust more in the proclaimed truth than in a lineage of officeholders, resulting in what Harmon identifies as the 'paper magisterium' of privileged confessions of faith.³⁵ Harmon proposes the Free Church perspective as a third option that grants teaching authority to the whole body of the faithful, visibly embodied in the local church. To rephrase a Free Church principle, this may be named the 'magisterium-hood of all believers'.³⁶ Baptists and Anabaptists alike present an account of theological and moral discernment carried out by the contributions of all, which are heard and evaluated in a careful, attentive, and prayerful process.

The retrieval of congregational hermeneutics by contemporary Baptist and Mennonite theologians evinces several common themes. They agree that 'reading in communion'³⁷ is a distinctively Free Church approach to biblical interpretation, theological reflection, and moral evaluation. On the one hand, it demonstrates an egalitarianism in which every baptised Christian, not

³² 'Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America', *Baptists Today* (26 June 1997), pp.8-10. Also reprinted as an appendix in Curtis W. Freeman, 'Can Baptist Theology Be Revisioned?', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* Vol 24:3 (1997), pp.303-310.

³³ Steven R. Harmon, 'The Nicene Faith and the Catholicity of the Church: Evangelical Retrieval and the Problem of Magisterium', in Timothy George, ed., *Evangelicals and Nicene Faith: Reclaiming the Apostolic Witness* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011), p.81.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.82.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.84, 86.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.86-88.

³⁷ Phrasing from Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, p.277.

designated experts, is a respectable contributor to conversations about things that matter. On the other hand, congregational hermeneutics refuses to accept passively the dissipation of discernment into a cacophony of idiosyncratic and isolated affirmations. Inherent in this vision is a pneumatic ecclesiology in which the Spirit speaks in and through the collection of voices brought together by grace. To varying degrees, the theologians engaged in this recovery acknowledge the inevitability of differences emerging in the forefront of community life whenever the hermeneutical project is enacted. If every believer can and should be a theologian, then each person will draw from the particularities of their life history, spiritual journey, prejudices, and desires to judge what is thought to be God's best for the here and now. But the conflictual encounter of internal otherness is inherently destabilizing, and because of this danger congregational hermeneutics was readily subsumed by patterns of delimited, established authority in the early histories of Baptists and Anabaptists. While the theory of congregational hermeneutics is being revived as constitutive of Free Church ecclesiology, a true recovery requires embodiment of this idea in a way that both honours, and constructively channels, the inevitable differences in believers' views. What is needed is a structure to sustain this important conviction as a first-order practice despite the challenge of immediate otherness.

Introducing the Circle Process

There exists an emerging method for group conversation that is amenable to Free Church convictions about reading Scripture together. It is known by many names – talking circles, the circle way, wisdom circles – but for convenience will simply be called 'the circle process' or sometimes just 'circles'. Practitioners Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea define the circle archetype that is shared by various related forms, stating it is 'essentially a gathering of equals, people who set aside external, hierarchical positions that categorize and separate them and sit down in a ring of chairs with a clearly defined intention or purpose...' ³⁸ The circle process, as will be shown, is a well-ordered framework for conversing openly across lines of difference, as participants speak directly from their experience and listen to one another with respect and compassion.

A common origins myth for the circle process identifies it as a vestige of our primordial ancestors. The literature of proponents is replete with the iconic description of ancient clans gathered in circumference around an evening fire, implying that open community conversations conducted in an egalitarian manner were the Edenic innocence from which humanity has

³⁸ Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea, *The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), xvi.

fallen.³⁹ A more traceable genealogical claim, also widespread in circle process writings and reproduced in academic research, asserts that the talking circle as we know it is essentially an inheritance from indigenous North Americans.⁴⁰ An extensive sociocultural or historical study of the circle has yet to be written, but a number of Native Americans have accepted the attribution.⁴¹

The adoption of circle process by the wider culture began with women's spirituality advocates at least as early as the 1960s.⁴² But it was not until the 1990s that circle proponents began publishing books in order to disseminate the concept more widely. The first introduction to the conversational circle format appeared in Christina Baldwin's *Calling the Circle* (1995).⁴³ The number of works outlining variations of the practice has continued to grow since that time, as have the non-profit organizations.

What follows is an outline of common features of the circle process. As indicated by the name, participants are seated in a circle to support robust and equitable engagement with one another.⁴⁴ Some advocates encourage marking the physical centre with some tangible representation of the gathering's purpose or meaning.⁴⁵ Simple opening and closing rituals – a prayer, a reading, lighting a candle – serve to centre the group emotionally and also set aside the meeting as a distinctive time of interpersonal encounter.⁴⁶ A secondary frame of the 'check-in' and 'check-out' may be included that allows persons to express their felt state of being and how it relates to their involvement in the circle.⁴⁷ The format for the conversation at the heart of circle process may vary depending upon the intent of the gathering, the subject of the discussion, and the nature of the relationships

³⁹ Kay Pranis, *The Little Book of Circle Processes: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking* (Intercourse, Pennsylvania: Good Books, 2005), p.3; Charles Garfield, et. al., *Wisdom Circles: A Guide to Self-Discovery and Community Building in Small Groups* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), pp.6ff. A particularly vivid example is found in Baldwin and Linnea, pp.4ff.

⁴⁰ Pranis, p.7; Lewis Mehl-Madrona and Barbara Mainguy, 'Introducing Healing Circles and Talking Circles into Primary Care', *The Permanente Journal* Vol 18:2 (2014), p.4.

⁴¹ Catherine I.S. Reimer, 'Working with Native American traditions', *Therapy Today* Vol 25:2 (2014), pp.18-21; Paulette Running Wolf and Julie A. Rickard, 'Talking Circles: A Native American Approach to Experiential Learning', *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* Vol 31:1 (2003), p.39; Michael T. Garrett, *Walking on the Wind: Cherokee Teachings for Harmony and Balance* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear & Company Publishing, 1998), pp.80-83.

⁴² Garfield, et. al., p.11; Pranis, p.8. Circles continue to be promoted as specially geared toward female participants. Cf. Robin Deen Carnes and Sally Craig, *Sacred Circles: A Guide to Creating Your Own Women's Spirituality Group* (New York: HarperOne, 1998); Jean Shinoda Bolen, *The Millionth Circle: How to Change Ourselves and the World* (York Beach, Maine: Conari Press, 1999).

⁴³ *Calling the Circle: The First and Future Culture* (Columbus, North Carolina: Swan Raven and Company, 1994).

⁴⁴ Baldwin and Linnea, p.21.

⁴⁵ Garfield, et. al., pp.39ff., 170-172; Baldwin and Linnea, pp.21ff.

⁴⁶ Pranis, pp.33ff.; Garfield, et. al. pp.166ff., 172ff.; Baldwin and Linnea, pp.22ff.

⁴⁷ Baldwin and Linnea, p.24, 32ff.; 'Council Circle,' The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society <<http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/council-circle>> (accessed 19 December 2015).

among those present. Frequently, speaking is regulated by the use of a ‘talking piece,’ a technique derivative of Native American practice.⁴⁸ The piece is an object passed around the circle that grants its bearer the prerogative to speak without interruption or response. Discussion may proceed through one or more ‘rounds’ as the piece moves around the circle and each person is given the opportunity, but not the obligation, to reflect on the stated question or topic. The use of the piece encourages respectful, attentive listening and gives space for the reticent to share their voice.⁴⁹ The talking piece is not always considered an essential element of the circle. Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea stress flexibility in their model of circle process, differentiating a spectrum of formality from the strict routine of talking piece rounds to the free play of open dialogue.⁵⁰ A hybrid approach combines the two, with conversation following upon the rounds.⁵¹

The operation of the circle is maintained by additional protocols and leadership roles that enforce them. Group members create together a set of guidelines – also called agreements or commitments – that define appropriate behaviours and attitudes. Clear expectations concerning respect for one another mark the circle as a safe space for authentic sharing. Exemplary principles listed by proponents include confidentiality, attentive listening, empowerment of each person as co-facilitator, and trust in the power of silence.⁵² The simplest leadership plan designates a host, facilitator, or ‘keeper’ who sets the tone and states the purpose for the meeting at the outset and who monitors and supports healthy participation for the duration.⁵³ Baldwin and Linnea include a ‘scribe’ to record group insights and decisions and a ‘guardian’ who pauses open conversation when it becomes too quickened or heated by ringing a bell or using a similar type of object.⁵⁴ Practitioners emphasize rotating leadership among constituents of an ongoing circle.

Since the 1990s, governments, businesses, and civic associations in North America and around the world have taken a practice which had heretofore been a private exercise with rather intangible benefits and

⁴⁸ Running Wolf and Rickard, p.40.

⁴⁹ Garfield, et. al., p.13; Pranis, p.12; Baldwin and Linnea, p.30.

⁵⁰ Baldwin and Linnea, p.30.

⁵¹ Mark Umbreit, ‘Talking Circles’, University of Minnesota Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking, <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/RJP/Projects/Victim-Offender-Dialogue/Peacemaking_Healing_Circles/Talking_Circles.pdf> (accessed 19 December 2015).

⁵² Ibid., 23f.; Garfield, et. al., 16; Pranis, 12f., 34f.; ‘The Circle of Trust Approach,’ Center for Courage & Renewal <<http://www.couragerenewal.org/approach/>> (accessed 19 December 2015).

⁵³ Baldwin and Linnea, p.20; Pranis, pp.36ff.; Jean Greenwood, ‘The Circle Process: A Path for Restorative Dialogue’, University of Minnesota Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/RJP/Projects/Victim-Offender-Dialogue/Peacemaking_Healing_Circles/The_Circle_Process.pdf> October 2005 (accessed 19 December 2015).

⁵⁴ Baldwin and Linnea, pp.28ff.

employed it to achieve social aims whose outcomes are more amenable to critical analysis. The original crossover occurred in northern Canada when certain judges formed ‘sentencing circles’ as a restorative justice technique for determining the punishments of indigenous offenders.⁵⁵ The American state of Minnesota soon followed suit, applying the circle process to different aspects of criminal justice and crime prevention.⁵⁶ The public and private sector uses of this practice have since proliferated. Organizations create circles for strategic planning and teambuilding, public service agencies utilize them for addiction recovery programmes and community planning, and counsellors treat family conflicts through them.⁵⁷ Circles are now conducted in schools as a response to misbehaviour that respects the agency and humanity of the troubled student. One notable exemplar of this effort is the organization Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY), whose efforts in that California city are aimed at curtailing the notorious ‘school-to-prison pipeline’ that afflicts minority youth. A study conducted by the University of California at Berkeley School of Law found that RJOY’s pilot programme ended expulsions and acts of violence at one middle school, while reducing the number of suspensions by 87 per cent.⁵⁸

It is not difficult to see why circles are effective for fostering robust communication, personal transformation, and conflict resolution. Participants assemble as equal contributors to seek collective wisdom in a setting of mutual respect.⁵⁹ Charles Garfield et. al. insist that the primary activity of the circle is listening, as opposed to winning an argument or implementing a personal agenda.⁶⁰ The act of listening, as Baldwin and Linnea note, affords an opportunity for individuals to break habitual thought patterns to see others, themselves, and the subject matter in a new light.⁶¹ Knowing that one is heard and respected creates the conditions to speak with an honesty tempered by sensitivity to the rest of the group. The egalitarian framework also honours and heightens each member’s agency. Because the values enshrined in a circle’s agreements are self-chosen, participants are more likely to adhere to them as opposed to the imposed standards of an external authority.⁶² The insistence on mutual responsibility nurtures collaborative approaches to difficulties with ‘buy-in’ from all parties, rather than the antagonistic and coercive dynamics of hierarchical enforcement,

⁵⁵ Pranis, p.8; Emma Cunliffe and Angela Cameron, ‘Writing the Circle: Judicially Convened Sentencing Circles and the Textual Organization of Criminal Justice’, *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* Vol 19:1 (2007), pp.11ff.

⁵⁶ Pranis, pp.9ff.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.17ff.

⁵⁸ Fania Davis, ‘Discipline with Dignity: Oakland Classrooms Try Healing Instead of Punishment’, *Reclaiming Children and Youth* Vol 2:1 (2014), pp.38-41.

⁵⁹ Pranis, pp.6ff.

⁶⁰ Garfield, et. al., p.83.

⁶¹ Baldwin and Linnea, p.40. Cf. Pranis, p.11.

⁶² Pranis, p.25.

win/lose argumentation, and victim/rescuer relationships.⁶³ Perhaps the power of this process for nurturing authentic community may best be summarized in the words of Baldwin and Linnea: ‘Circle gives us a container for receiving difference without doing violence to one another.’⁶⁴

Community Hermeneutics as Circling Around Scripture

Although the circle process entered mainstream culture as a tool for personal spiritual development, it has flowered in a variety of social applications and now stands as a tested instrument for building community and resolving even violent conflicts generated by encounters with otherness. Apart from achieving practical results, this model demonstrates its suitability for Free Church Christians by virtue of common features shared with congregational hermeneutics. Both approaches stress the equal involvement of each person in the conversation, trusting that insight can come from any quarter. But neither sees gathering together as the mere assembling of individuals who offer only the pre-formed fruit of a foreclosed identity. Rather, collective wisdom is an emergent phenomenon of the meeting itself, as persons experience new and renewed perspectives. For Baptists and Anabaptists gathered around Scripture, that wisdom is seen as the product of a *perichoretic* encounter involving human selves, the text, and the living Spirit of God.

Baptists may take special note of the covenantal nature of the circle. The practice of writing church covenants as doctrinal and moral standards to which members’ adherence is expected is another neglected and rediscovered aspect of the Baptist heritage.⁶⁵ The egalitarianism of neither the Free Church nor the circle process intends a value-neutral setting. Actions and beliefs clearly antithetical to the communal self-identity are rejected and anyone who persists in them effects a self-exclusion. Baptists historically exercised vigorous church discipline, having pledged in their covenants to ‘walk together’ in the way of mutual admonition and encouragement.⁶⁶ Similarly, the agreements made in a circle form a covenant by which members hold one another accountable. The medium of this

⁶³ ‘Peacemaking Circles: A process for solving problems and building community’, Oakland Unified School District
<<http://www.ousd.org/cms/lib07/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/97/PeacemakingCircles.pdf>> (accessed 19 December 2015).

⁶⁴ Baldwin and Linnea, p.196.

⁶⁵ David W. Bebbington, *Baptists through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010), p.182.; Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity*, pp.231-235, 246ff.; Ellis, pp.90ff.

⁶⁶ Charles W. DeWeese, *Baptist Church Covenants* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1990). Some specific examples of the language of ‘walking together’ found in covenants from both Britain and America, can be seen on pp. 116-119, 126, 133ff., 157.

accountability is one's willingness to listen charitably and withhold judgement.⁶⁷ When a hospitable environment is formed in the circle, persons can feel a greater freedom to challenge and be challenged in a spirit of gentleness and loving support.

Although characterised by certain commitments, congregational hermeneutics and the circle process alike welcome the exchanging and weighing of perspectives as persons bearing diverse experiences and ideas gather together. Free Church Christians have accepted some debate over biblical interpretation and application by acknowledging both human fallibility and the potential for new understanding in emerging contexts. The very purpose of the circle process, meanwhile, is to serve as a meeting place where varying outlooks are voiced and acknowledged.

Given these compatibilities, the circle process can be a helpful means of restoring congregational hermeneutics as part of the lived theology of the Free Church. An oft-noted paradox states that structure enables genuine freedom, and so the established dimensions of the circle provide a suitable container for hearing and discussing manifold readings of Scripture for the life of the church. Circle practices inoculate against both hierarchicalism and clericalism, on the one hand, and individualist anarchism on the other. Baptists and Anabaptists have sought to hold this difficult middle ground between the two extremes, and it is the destabilizing character of disagreement among the faithful that has propelled distortions of their heritage toward either direction. But if the magisterium-hood of all believers is to be maintained as a central claim, then the inevitable conflict that will arise from reading Scripture together must be constructively supported and managed as the whole people of God seek faithfulness together. The circle process is a proven model for tending to many voices in a spirit of partnership and expectation. When it is utilized for the Free Church practice of gathering to read Scripture, churches may yet realise a new instantiation of this historical tradition – one that is more capable of receptivity to difference. This approach to reading in communion may be called 'conversational hermeneutics', for open and continual discussion among participants is prioritised as the means to ascertain and disseminate shared meanings gleaned from the text.

What follows is a hypothetical structure for circle-based conversational hermeneutics.⁶⁸ Participants enter the circle and begin with the lighting of a candle, the singing of a hymn, or a prayer. The facilitator initiates a check-in, passing the talking piece in a round as each person shares a brief word about his or her personal life. The facilitator may choose to offer

⁶⁷ Baldwin and Linnea, p.68.

⁶⁸ This format is not *entirely* hypothetical, being based in part on the author's own experience leading non-directive Bible study.

a prayer for expressed concerns and thanksgivings. The talking piece is then set down as two volunteers read the chosen Scripture passage, each time followed by a period of reflective silence.⁶⁹ The facilitator then breaks silence and encourages open discussion on the text. If the conversation gets particularly tense or heated, anyone may request the return of the talking piece. Once the allotted time has expired, the piece is passed in a check-out round as members share the insight they take with them from this gathering. The facilitator and the text for the following meeting are chosen, if not already decided in advance; by a set rotation, in the case of the former, and by the lectionary or a *lectio continua* format in the case of the latter. After an elapsed time of sixty-to-ninety minutes, the circle closes with prayer.

Two additional roles could be added to this method. The watchful care of the guardian as described by Baldwin and Linnea provides another option for tempering sharp disagreement. A newly-conceived role answers the reasonable objection that the Scripture circle's horizons are limited by a failure to engage biblical scholarship or the history of interpretation. This person would agree to review commentaries or other interpretive aids, perhaps consulting the pastor for assistance, and can contribute the fruit of this study as part of the conversation. A suggested name for this new circle duty is the 'librarian.'⁷⁰

The circle process has received particular commendation in this essay, but it is expected and indeed hoped that what has been written may inspire experimentation as various and perhaps novel forms of congregational and conversational hermeneutics take shape in local church contexts. Should this indeed occur, and reading in communion achieve renewed currency as an ecclesial practice, further theological reflection must meet the questions that arise as difference is made more visible in open discussion. Such questions will likely wrestle with the longstanding tensions between unity and diversity, liberty of conscience and mutual accountability, and the self-governance and interdependence of churches. Christian communities have been rent in schism because of conflicts shaped by such tensions. But perhaps sitting in circle together will form better habits of patience and

⁶⁹ Repeated reading interspersed by silence provides an opportunity for multifaceted meditation on a text by participants. One aspect of the passage may be noticed and examined during the first interval of silence while another comes to the fore during the second. A facilitator could provide prompting questions as a means to catalyse the thoughts of circle members during the silences. In the author's Bible studies, the typical prompts for reflection were first, 'What do you notice?' and then, 'What inspires you, what challenges you, or what raises a question for you?' This practice of multiple readings paired with quiet reflection derives from the ancient spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*. Cf. Daniel L. Prechtel, *Where Two or Three are Gathered: Spiritual Direction for Small Groups* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), pp.50-55.

⁷⁰ The workload for the librarian need not be as difficult as it sounds, for credible resources do exist on the Internet – often written primarily for preachers. The author highly recommends 'The Text This Week' as a premier web portal that collates materials and organizes them according to the cycle of the Church Year: <http://www.textweek.com/>.

charity, laying the groundwork for significant corporate discernment being practised in congregations, associations, or even within and across denominations.

Conclusion: Unbreaking the Circle

In 1907, the English hymnist Ada Ruth Habershon penned the words of a song that has since become a favourite of American gospel music. *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?* reflects on the parting of loved ones and the hope of happy reunion in the eternal light of God's love. The chorus ponders the restoration of connections severed *in media res*:

Will the circle be unbroken

By and by, Lord, by and by?

There's a better home awaiting

In the sky, Lord, in the sky.

Death is the agent in this song that has pulled apart close relationships and it is death that Habershon longs to see overcome. But in the pilgrim journey of this present life, there are little deaths that occur when differing perspectives sunder the cords that bind persons with intimate fellowship. Even Christians who worship together in the same congregation, nominally committed to mutual care and oversight, can be estranged from one another because of opposing values, concerns, and goals. Applying the circle process to congregational hermeneutics offers a means for bridging such gaps, while re-integrating a distinctive Baptist and Anabaptist principle into the actual lifeways of churches. It may yet be possible, in moments of grace, to 'unbreak' the circle on this side of the veil.

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Refugees: Exploring Theological and Missiological Foundations

Rupen Das

Introduction

The refugee crisis engulfing the world right now is not a new phenomenon. It is only the latest wave of refugees who are fleeing conflict, persecution, destruction of their homes and livelihoods, and death. Displacement as a result of war and natural disasters has a long history through the ages. While there are legal differences between refugees and migrants, in reality there are very few differences because people move when they are unable to continue living and supporting their families where they are.

The level of human suffering of these waves of refugees requires the church and Christians to understand God's perspective on refugees. Yet how the church demonstrates the reality and compassion of Christ to those displaced will vary from context to context. While the majority of the refugees are comparatively poor, their needs are different from those who live in poverty, because refugees have lost their homes and their identity. Princeton theologian Daniel Migliore writes, 'Confession of Jesus Christ takes place in particular historical and cultural contexts. Our response to the questions of who we say Jesus Christ is and how he helps us is shaped in important ways by the particular context in which these questions arise.'¹

This paper will explore the biblical, theological, and missiological foundations, as well as some observations from current missions for this discussion. While most of what will be discussed is common for all refugees, there are some aspects that are specific to ministering to Muslim refugees.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

The problem of refugees and displacement cannot only be analysed through political and social lenses. The theological and biblical framework and context for understanding the problem of refugees and displacement is the fallen world in which we live. Sin is not only an individual reality but is manifested in social institutions and values. American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr states that evil is often thought of as an individual trait, whereas

¹ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004).

institutions may in effect represent a far more insidious evil that is more likely to abuse power and is usually more resistant to change.² There are social, legal, and economic structures in society that are unjust and inherently evil. These may be in the form of deeply imbedded social attitudes, legal and economic systems, or religious and social practices that discriminate against specific people, groups, and individuals. Racism, apartheid, communalism, sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, political oppression, hyper-patriotism, human trafficking, forced displacement, and ethnic cleansing are just some examples of how these socially imbedded attitudes surface in everyday life. Often these attitudes are institutionalized through laws, economic policies, and institutions that discriminate against particular groups or favour the wealthy, the elite, and specific social groups.³ This is the context within which displacement with its devastating consequences of dehumanizing individuals and whole communities takes place. It highlights our role as a society in any refugee or migrant crisis regarding how they are treated. This is also the context within which God responds and brings healing and wholeness.

The Grace and Compassion of God

Displacement has always been a reality since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve were displaced from their home that God had created for them because of their disobedience. Cain was judged and driven from the area where he had made his home because of jealousy and murder. Centuries later, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was conquered and the elite were driven into exile because of idolatry and social injustice. Yet what is remarkable in each instance is the character of God, who extends grace and unmerited favour to those who have been displaced, enabling them to cope with the consequences of their own actions, even though the crisis was their fault. In the case of Adam and Eve, He provided them with clothing so that they could cope with the consequences of shame. Even in their exile from His presence, God never abandoned them but blessed them with children (Genesis 4.1) and enabled them to worship Him (Genesis 4.3-4). God gave Cain a physical mark so that as he wandered he would be protected and not harmed, as he feared. God never abandoned ancient Israel in exile and promised that at the right time He would restore them (Jeremiah 29.10-14).

² Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics* (New York: Scribner's, 1932), *passim*.

³ Others who have written extensively about institutionalized evil (sin) include Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992) and Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1917).

He even instructed them what to do so that He could bless them in exile (Jeremiah 29.4-8).

At other times, when the tribes of Jacob were humiliated and enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years, away from the land they had lived in, God heard their cry and sent them a liberator. So, whether people are displaced because of their own actions or are victims of the brutality of others, God is concerned for their plight and wellbeing. God never abandons His creation and in His righteousness will fulfil His obligation to them.⁴ God's character demonstrated through His grace, compassion, and righteousness is the starting point in knowing how God relates to the refugees and displaced.

God's Concern for the Displaced and Vulnerable

God caring for those who live on the margins of society because of their suffering is a prophetic act. It illustrates physically God's concern for those who are spiritually not part of His Kingdom, because of the evil that has broken them and the darkness that holds them in bondage. It is a prophetic act also because caring for those who suffer shows what the Kingdom of God is really like – where the weak, poor, the vulnerable, the broken, the refugee, and the rejected are not discarded but are valued and find that they belong. It speaks about the value and worth of each person in the economy of God. Because He created them, they are of equal value, regardless of their social or economic status, nationality or ethnicity.

While much has been written as to why God cares for the poor,⁵ there is very little on why God cares for the displaced and the vulnerable foreigner, other than the fact that He does. God's concern for the displaced (the refugee and migrant) speaks to the fact that human beings are created to belong to specific places. In creation God placed human beings in a specific location. The consequences of sin included being uprooted and displaced from what

⁴ Theologian James D.G. Dunn emphasizes the relational dimensions of righteousness and states that God's righteousness was the 'fulfillment of His covenant obligation as Israel's God in delivering, saving, and vindicating Israel, despite Israel's own failure' (Dunn, p.342). So, just as God was righteous in His relationship with Israel, He is also righteous with the rest of His creation and will fulfill His obligation to redeem and save them. (Romans 1.16-17). Dunn states that while the Greek understanding of righteousness meant a state of moral perfection, in Hebrew thought 'righteousness' is understood more as a relational concept – 'as the meeting of obligations laid upon the individual by the relationship of which he or she is part.' James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p.341. German theologian G. Schrenk states that *sedaqa* implies a relationship. He writes, 'This linking of right and salvation is most deeply grounded in the covenant concept. *Sedaqa* is the execution of covenant faithfulness and the covenant promises. God's righteousness as His judicial reign means that in covenant faithfulness to His people He vindicates and saves them.' Quoted in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1980), p.755.

⁵ Rupen Das, *Compassion and the Mission of God: Revealing the Invisible Kingdom* (Leicester: Langham Global Library, 2015).

had been their home and all that was familiar to them. Anglican theologian John Inge states, ‘place is a fundamental category of human experience’⁶ and therefore the theological dimensions of the interaction between place and human beings needs to be understood. Philosopher and Christian mystic Simone Weil explains:

To be rooted is perhaps the most important need of the human soul. It is the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of the community, which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations of the future...It is necessary for him to draw well-nigh the whole of his moral, intellectual, and spiritual life by way of the environment of which he form[s] a natural part.⁷

Belonging to a place gives a person an identity. The identities of Paul of Tarsus and Joseph of Arimathea indicated not only their hometown, but also identified who they were in terms of their family, social standing, and culture. Even the Son of God was referred to as Jesus of Nazareth. After identifying Jesus was from Nazareth, Nathaniel responds to Philip, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ (John1.46 ESV). The place implied the moral character of its inhabitants. The idea that one’s existence is somehow connected to a place is what Craig Bartholomew, Professor of philosophy at Redeemer University College, refers to as *implacement*.⁸ He writes that the Bible reveals how God ‘intends for humans to be at home, to indwell, in their places; place and implacement is a gift and provides the possibility for imagining God in his creation’.⁹

Therefore, physical belonging, along with all its social, psychological, and cultural dimensions, provides the foundation to understand what it means to belong to an eternal Kingdom and a heavenly family. It is in understanding the importance of belonging to a place and the devastation that displacement causes to an individual, by destroying their identity and sense of self and dehumanizing them, that one begins to grasp God’s concern for the displaced. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann states that existentialists do not understand that there is ‘human hunger for a sense of place.’ He writes, ‘it is rootlessness and not meaninglessness that characterizes the current crisis. There are no meanings apart from roots’.¹⁰

Brueggemann explains that physical places have meaning in the biblical narrative. He writes, ‘land is never simply physical dirt but is always physical dirt freighted with social meanings derived from historical

⁶ John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), p.46.

⁷ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1952), p.43.

⁸ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), Kindle location 174.

⁹ Ibid, Kindle location 698.

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), p.4.

experience'.¹¹ Brueggemann looks at the Old Testament narrative through the lens of the land and suggests that the central problem in the Bible is about homelessness (anomie¹²).¹³ The New Testament affirms this narrative when the letter to the Hebrews refers to certain Old Testament characters as 'being strangers and exiles' and 'seeking a homeland' (Hebrews 11.13-14 ESV). God then responds to the problem of displacement and loss of their home by bringing them into an eternal city, a new home, and a new identity in a heavenly country (v.16). Hebrews 12.1-2 then encourages Christians to follow the example of Jesus who bears the loss of everything so that He could be 'home' at the right hand of the Father. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Philippi, states, 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' (Philippians 3.20). This dual identity of an earthly sense of belonging to a particular place and a heavenly home and citizenship are intertwined. However, the loss of an earthly home and all that it means still allows the refugee to be secure in a heavenly and enduring citizenship if they choose to accept the gift God offers.

This understanding of the importance of place and the devastating and dehumanizing experience of displacement provides the framework to understand God's compassion and concern for the foreigner in ancient Israel.¹⁴ As Israel transitioned from a group of nomadic tribes wandering in the wilderness to forming a nation in the land into which they were led, the social contract that they established through the laws that were given to them by God identified the importance of care of the vulnerable in society.¹⁵ While in the first giving of the Law in Exodus (the Covenant Code) foreigners were not identified as a vulnerable group, the foundation for how they were to be treated was described in Exodus 23.9, 'Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.'

¹¹ Ibid, p.2.

¹² Dictionary.com defines it as 'a state or condition of individuals or society characterized by a breakdown or absence of social norms and values, as in the case of uprooted people'. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as 'social instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values; also: personal unrest, alienation, and uncertainty that comes from a lack of purpose or ideals.'

¹³ Brueggemann, *The Land*, p.187.

¹⁴ The foreigner in the Old Testament was known as a *ger* who is 'essentially a foreigner who lives more or less permanently in the midst of another community, where he is accepted and enjoys certain rights'. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), p.74. Abraham and Moses were *gerim*. Later when the Israelites settled in the land and saw themselves as 'the people of the land' and the legitimate owners, all the former inhabitants became *gerim*, unless they became slaves or were assimilated into Israelite society through marriage. To this group were latter added immigrants. So while the *gerim* were free men and not slaves, they did not have full civic or political rights. Since most of the landed property was in the hands of the Israelites, the *gerim* worked by hiring out their services. So they were poor and were considered in the same category as the widows, orphans and the other poor, who were protected by the Mosaic Law to receive charity and help.

¹⁵ These included the slaves, who were to be part of households; and even though they did not have any rights, there were guidelines on how they were to be treated and cared for. The most vulnerable were the widows and orphans, who were to be cared for by the extended family. If for some reason this did not happen, the community had to assume responsibility to care for them.

The experience and history of the Jews in Egypt would give them a fresh and deeper understanding of a new dimension of poverty and exclusion, and as a result would impact the social contract that was beginning to be defined by the Covenant Code of Exodus.¹⁶ The Jews by then understood the devastation that displacement causes. By the time of the second giving of the law, the Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy 12-26), the fixed word pair of 'widows and orphans' to signify the most vulnerable and poor¹⁷ now included the stranger in the land (Deuteronomy 24.20).

This is significant because, while in the cultures surrounding ancient Israel there was much in the Egyptian wisdom texts and prayers, and in the ancient Near Eastern royal ideology, of being just and compassionate to the poor in everyday life, in business dealings, and in the court, there was nothing about care for the foreigners who did not belong to the community and nation. A king's concern was only for his citizens and never for the foreigner. This unique distinction of concern for the vulnerable foreigner in Israel's law speaks of God's compassion for the displaced.

Jesus and the Vulnerable Foreigner

The Gospels do not speak much about displacement or refugees. They occasionally refer to strangers and briefly mention that Jesus, as a child, was a refugee. However, Jesus follows in the tradition of the Old Testament of showing compassion for the vulnerable in society.¹⁸ At least seventy-five to eighty per cent of his audience were poor, which included foreigners residing in the land.¹⁹

Only a few of Jesus' encounters with foreigners were recorded. In His conversation at the well with the Samaritan woman, who belonged to a community that was despised and marginalized by the Jews, Jesus showed

¹⁶ David J. Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), pp.40-42.

¹⁷ Arthur Glasser, *Announcing The Kingdom: The Story Of God's Mission In The Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), pp.87-88.

¹⁸ So when Jesus spoke about the poor, He was referring to the majority who were oppressed because of the greed and injustice of a small wealthy and powerful elite. When He taught and preached, his listeners were the chronically poor and those in extreme poverty (who lived on the fringes of society), while some from the wealthy and elite sections of society listened in. He used parables about being exploited that they could relate to (Mark 12.40-44; Matthew 18.21-35). He spoke about a God who cared enough to feed the birds of the air and clothe the flowers of the field because they were worried about their next meal and did not have a spare set of clothes or enough warm clothing for the winter (Matthew 6.25-34). He fed them as they listened to Him teach, because they did not have enough food to bring with them (Matthew 14.13-21). He healed them because they could not afford to go to the doctors (Matthew 8.1-17, 9.1-8, 12. 9-14, and so many more).

¹⁹ Philip A. Harland, 'The Economy of First-Century Palestine: State of the Scholarly Discussion', in *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches*, eds. Anthony J. Blasi, Jean Duhaime and Philip-Andre Turcotte (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2002), p.515.

her respect, compassion and understanding. When a centurion of the hated Roman occupying army approached Jesus for healing of his servant (Luke 17.1-10), He honoured the centurion in front of the crowd for his understanding of authority and faith, while also healing the servant. During a visit to Tyre, when a Syro-Phoenician woman approached Jesus asking for deliverance of her daughter from demonic spirits, Jesus did not ignore her because she did not belong to the Jewish community, but healed her daughter. In every instance, Jesus showed respect to the foreigners and in compassion met their needs and made no distinction between them and the poor and vulnerable Jews to whom He was ministering.

When Jesus described the judgement seat of Christ in Matthew 25.31-46, He specifically referred to the faithful who had invited in strangers (v.35). Strangers in first century Palestine were non-Jewish foreigners, tended to be poor, and did not belong to the community. Jesus was stressing that those strangers who were desperate and in need were as much His concern as were the Jewish poor, widows and orphans.

While the needs and problems of the poor are different from those who have been forcibly displaced, both groups are vulnerable, experience deprivation, and often face discrimination. So when Jesus speaks about the poor He is referring to all those who are vulnerable. God's attitude towards the vulnerable (the poor, migrants, refugees, disabled, and others) is probably most clearly seen in the parable Jesus told about Lazarus the beggar. The parable is about the rich and poor in first century Palestine (who also included widows, orphans, and foreigners) where the rich were immortalized in lavish burial tombs that honoured their name and memory. Going against the cultural norm, Jesus instead honours Lazarus, who was not only poor but also a beggar who had nothing and no social standing, so that he is remembered by history through the living memorial of the parable, because he has a name. However, Jesus leaves the rich man anonymous and thus having no lasting honour. By giving Lazarus a name, Jesus identifies him as a unique individual and not just as one of the poor who hide in shame.

In the parable, the name that Jesus pointedly chooses for the beggar is Lazarus, which is derived from Hebrew אֵלְעָזָר, El'āzār, meaning 'one whom God has helped'. Through that He reveals the heart of God for the poor and the broken. The dogs, whose saliva is healing for his sores, care for Lazarus. God's creatures had more compassion for the beggar who was sick and desperately hungry than the rich man, who was oblivious of Lazarus' existence as he passed him every day as he went in and out of his house.

The rich man is not condemned for being rich, but for not being concerned for the poor. His concern right to the end remains only for his family and never for those who are not part of his social circle. He excludes

the outsider as not being worthy of his attention and care. Abu Zayd ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibn Muhammad Ibn Khaldun al-Hadhrami (known as Ibn Khaldun), the Tunisian Arab historian and sociologist, observes that tribes survived by taking care of their own and rarely those who did not belong to their tribe.²⁰ Jesus challenges this prevailing attitude that a family’s and tribe’s only concern should be for their own, to the exclusion of all others.

The most remarkable thing in the parable is that Lazarus never complains nor speaks throughout the parable. Culturally he would not have been allowed to speak to the rich. How can one so shamefully poor and socially outcast speak with an honourable member of the community? God breaks through this stifling cultural barrier and honours him by speaking for him who has no voice.

Lessons from Missions

Missiological and Historical Foundation

Based on these biblical and theological foundations, the missiological paradigm to understand how to relate to and minister to refugees is found in Croatian theologian, now at Yale, Miroslav Volf’s concept of exclusion and embrace. He writes that so many of the sins we commit against our neighbour are acts of exclusion.²¹ Volf describes exclusion as

not recognizing the other as someone who in his or her otherness belongs to the pattern of interdependence. The other then emerges as an inferior being who must either be assimilated by being made like the self or be subjugated to the self.²²

The foreigner, the refugee and the migrant are thus seen as a threat to the values and security of the community. Volf writes that such societies have a false sense of purity and ‘want the world cleansed of the other rather than the heart cleansed of the evil that drives people out by calling those who are clean “unclean” and refusing to help make clean those who are unclean’.²³

In understanding how refugees and migrants are mistreated and excluded from society, the basis for any ministry to them is found in God’s act of redemption. Volf writes, ‘God’s reception of hostile humanity into divine communion is a model of how human beings should relate to the other.’²⁴ He explains that in order to move from exclusion to embrace there

²⁰Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.x.

²¹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), p.72.

²² Ibid, p.67.

²³ Ibid, p.74.

²⁴ Ibid, p.100.

need to be moments that provide space for repentance, forgiveness, making space in oneself for the other, and healing of memory.

In a world where violence against migrants and refugees is becoming commonplace because of the perceived threat that they pose, Volf states that neutrality is not an option because taking the side of those suffering is in the prophetic and apostolic traditions of the Bible. He writes, ‘These people hear the groans of the suffering, take a stance, and act...After all, they are called to seek and struggle for *God’s* justice, not their own.’²⁵

In order to understand Volf’s concept of social exclusion with regards to Muslim refugees, it is important to realize that it is deeply rooted in Arab history and culture, often for good reasons. Ibn Khaldun observes that ‘only tribes held together by group feelings can live in the desert...’²⁶ since the group ensured the survival and wellbeing of the individual. Yet this obligation was always limited in practice to the immediate group, family or clan and very rarely beyond it.²⁷ The reason for this is the concept of *assabiyah*, which Ibn Khaldun says refers to group solidarity or group consciousness. *Assabiyah* was what binds society, family, tribe, religion and nation. It gives people a sense of belonging and ensures stability of institutions in the community. It is the driving force behind all social change.²⁸ The fear is that a loss of group cohesion as described by *assabiyah* will result in the destruction of the community. Fida Muhammad at the Eastern New Mexico University writes, ‘Disintegration of collective consciousness creates anomie (moral de-regulation)...Loss of *assabiyah* will also create moral and economic individualism, but will end up in the destruction of a civilization.’²⁹ A focus on the group cohesion ensures the survival of the group but in the process excludes the outsider or other groups.

This then provides the foundation for ministering to Muslim refugees. In the midst of their displacement, they have also lost their community which supports them and which also provides them with their social, religious, cultural, and ethnic identity. As refugees they have become foreigners who do not belong in their host community. As Brueggemann stated, the crisis is one of rootlessness and, without being physically, socially, and culturally rooted, individuals cannot find meaning.

²⁵ Ibid, p.219.

²⁶ Quoted in Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.x.

²⁷ Bruce Malina, writing about collectivistic societies states, ‘Should a group member fall ill, the goal of an individual’s healing is group well-being. Focus is on the ingroup, cooperation with ingroup members, maintenance of ascribed status, and group-centered values.’ Bruce J. Malina, ‘Collectivism in Mediterranean Culture’ in *Understanding the Social World Of The New Testament*, edited by Richard E. DeMaris and Dietmar Neufeld (London: Routledge, 2010), p.23.

²⁸ Fida Mohammad, ‘Ibn Khaldun's Theory of Social Change: A Comparison Between Hegel, Marx And Durkheim’, *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* Vol 15:2 (Summer 1998), pp.36-37.

²⁹ Ibid, p.34.

The present refugee crisis is reminiscent of the church's response in the fourth and fifth centuries as the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire collapsed and poverty increased. The cities were unable to absorb the poor refugees, most of whom were not citizens. Princeton University church historian Peter Brown writes:

The existing structures of the city and the civic model that had been associated with them collapsed under the sheer weight of a desolate human surplus, as the cities filled with persons who were palpably "poor". They could not be treated as citizens, neither could they be ignored....³⁰

It was the Christians, who were still a relatively small but growing minority, who responded to the needs of the poor, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or religion. Brown writes about these Christians, 'They [lay and clerical alike] were themselves, agents of change.'³¹

This ministry of compassion and charity as demonstrated by the lay people and the church leadership in the Roman Empire had a significant influence on the social values of the society. Walter Brueggemann highlights the growing appreciation of the

legitimacy of the cry of the poor [that] created a social awareness that the powerful were obligated to provide justice and protection for the poor. Through the work of the bishops the poor were given a voice that created "an advocacy revolution"....³²

The impact was not just social. German missiologist Adolf von Harnack, in his monumental book *The Mission and the Expansion of Christianity*, stated that the 'Gospel of Love and Charity' (*Evangelium der Liebe und Hilfeleistung*), was the main factor in the rise and growth of the church.³³

Missiological Lessons

Missiologically, the present refugee crisis in Syria and Iraq and the church's response needs to be understood in the context of the history of missions among Muslims. David Garrison, in his book *Wind in the House of Islam*,³⁴ describes many of the different ways the church historically has sought to minister to Muslim communities. There seems to have been no single strategy, but it varied depending on the historical and social context. The

³⁰ Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Latter Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002), p.8.

³¹ Ibid, pp.8-9.

³² Walter Brueggemann, 'How the Early Church Practiced Charity', *The Christian Century* (14 June 2003), p.30.

³³ Adolf von Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*. Trans. J. Moffat (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1961).

³⁴ David Garrison, *Wind in the House of Islam: How God Is Drawing Muslims Around The World To Faith In Jesus Christ* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2014).

earliest recorded significant number of conversions was in AD 972 and then in AD 975 when many tribes in Syria and Palestine converted to Christianity to avoid the financial demands of their Muslim rulers. Since then some attempts to reach Muslims have included:

- Forced conversions (during the Crusades);
- Preaching, a simple lifestyle, and miracles (Conrad of Ascoli in Libya, 13th Century);
- Study of Islamic culture and language (William of Tripoli in Lebanon, 13th Century);
- Learning Arabic and use of tact and persuasion in evangelism, along with respect of the rights of Muslims to property (Granada, Spain, 15th Century);
- Using the local translation of the Bible, aggressive apologetics, and contextualized communities for the converts (Indonesia, late 19th Century);
- Use of Arabic and embracing the culture of the people they served (the White Fathers, Algeria, late 19th Century);
- Focusing on Muslim clerics in evangelism (Ethiopia, 1910);
- Being aware that during times of political and religious crises thousands of Muslims turn to the church and to Christ (Indonesia, 1965; Iran, since the Islamic revolution in 1979; Algeria, 1990s; and Bangladesh, since independence in 1971).³⁵

God has also been using all avenues of Christian media, as well as Christian-Muslim dialogue, and dreams and visions to introduce Muslims to Christ. There has also been a significant interest in establishing insider movements as a strategy for Muslims to encounter Christ and yet remain within their context in the hope that the Gospel would flow along family, clan and tribal relationships.

At other times, especially during the mid-1800s when it was impossible by law in the Ottoman Empire for Muslims to convert, Protestant missions in the Near East focused on establishing educational and medical institutions to improve local conditions and the lives of Muslims and other local inhabitants. However, the objective was much more profound. Rufus Anderson, who was the senior secretary of the Prudential Committee of the ABCFM³⁶ in Boston, after a number of trips to the region in the mid-1800s, referring to the historical churches in the Near East, wrote, ‘They need to see

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).

– as Muslims also need to see – “living exemplification of the gospel” with all its benevolent influences on society, culture and the nation.’³⁷

The present Syrian crisis has identified another way that God is revealing the Kingdom of God and the reality of Christ to Muslims. The foundations of this are found in the research of Dudley Woodberry at Fuller Theological Seminary, where he interviewed 750 Muslim background believers, asking them what attracts Muslims to follow Jesus.³⁸ Among the findings, two are significant in this context. The first was that they are attracted to seeing a lived faith. This was seen in the love expressed to others, loving Christian marriages, and willingness to be sensitive to the local culture and religious values, among many other attitudes and behaviour. They were also attracted by the love of God for all people, even enemies. Woodberry writes, ‘When Christ’s love transforms committed Christians into a loving community, many Muslims listed a desire to join such a fellowship as next in importance.’³⁹

As the Syrian refugees flooded into Lebanon and Jordan, as had Iraqi refugees previously, many Lebanese and Jordanian evangelical churches, and churches inside Syria, felt that it was important that the churches intentionally show the love and compassion of Christ to the refugees and the internally displaced, regardless of their faith. Depending on the location and the funding available, they provided food aid, health care, education and other activities for children, and emergency supplies for the winter months. Most of the churches ensured that there was no conditionality to the assistance that was being provided and that those displaced were not required to attend any activities in order to receive the aid. This demonstration of love and compassion seems to have had a significant impact.

Since this move of the Holy Spirit in the Levant is still quite new, it is too early to evaluate the impact. However, there are some observations that may be of value for this consultation.⁴⁰

1. The local church and the community of believers are critical in this strategy. Foreigners who have been involved have been in the background providing support, and facilitating the humanitarian aid being provided and the spiritual ministry being done. There are a

³⁷ Quoted in Habib Badr, ‘American Protestant Missionary Beginnings in Beirut and Istanbul: Politics, Practice and Response’, in *New Faiths in Ancient Lands*, by Heleen Murre-van den Berg (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2006), p.224.

³⁸ Woodberry, J. Dudley, Russell G. Shubin, and G. Marks. ‘Why Muslims Follow Jesus: The Results Of A Recent Survey Of Converts From Islam’, *Christianity Today*, October 24, 2007. Accessed 13 April 2015. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/october/42.80.html>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ These are mainly those of the author who has been involved directly with the local churches and refugees in Lebanon and Syria, and more recently with Syrian refugees in Europe. It also includes observations by other workers in the field.

number of reasons why this is important. The first is that an Arab community being the point of contact for the refugees ensures that they do not have to cross too many cultural barriers.⁴¹ They would not be seen as ‘joining’ a foreign group. Secondly, and more important, is that a local church that is rooted in a local community (rather than an aid agency that comes in only to distribute aid) is able to demonstrate the love and compassion of Christ in ways that are real and tangible by welcoming them and ministering to their needs.

This has a number of implications. A comment that many pastors and church members heard from Muslim refugees as they received assistance was, “But, you know, we are Muslims.” They were surprised that Christians would help somebody outside their community. Being so deeply ingrained with what Ibn Khaldun talked about, that one only helps those within their own tribe, the clear impact of reaching beyond one’s religious, tribal, national and ethnic boundary and helping those in need is significant. It also reflects what Woodberry found in his research that many Muslims are attracted to the love of God demonstrated through His people.

2. The local church is not a social or humanitarian agency. It is the Body of Christ, which means that the spiritual dimensions permeate everything that the church does, including the humanitarian assistance that is provided. The reality of Christ needs to be lived out as a community and in the community. Countless Muslim refugees have commented that they respect the spirituality and the Christian disciplines of believers.⁴² Woodberry pointed out in his research that that one of the most important reasons Muslims choose to follow Christ is because of ‘the power of God in answered prayers and healing’.⁴³ Many pastors said that when they offered to pray for the refugees, the comment that they would hear is, “Do you mean that God knows my needs and would hear me when I pray?” What the Muslim refugees were desperately seeking was a genuine encounter with God.

Orthodox priest and missiologist Edward Rommen identifies a key distinction between traditional forms of evangelism and being a witness. Referring to the process of contextualization, he and David Hesselgrave had written that it is best viewed as an ‘attempt to communicate *the message* of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God’s

⁴¹ However, it is important to acknowledge that there are considerable differences between Arab Christian and Muslim cultures.

⁴² This is the author’s experience in Afghanistan also where Muslim national staff of the humanitarian agency he worked for commented that they respected the Christians who practised and lived their faith in contrast to secularized westerners who had no faith and were involved in activities that were offensive to Muslims. The author is clear to distinguish between the attitudes and behaviour of radical extremist elements in Muslim society and those of the majority of Muslims.

⁴³ Woodberry, *Why Muslims Follow Jesus*.

revelation as it is put forth in the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts'.⁴⁴ Writing twenty-four years after that original statement, Rommen states, 'the definition given in 1989 includes the communication of a message about a person but not the introduction of the person proper.'⁴⁵ What Muslim refugees seemed to be attracted to was the reality of the Person of Christ and only after that to the message about the Person.⁴⁶ So the local church through its ministry of compassion and humanitarian assistance enables and facilitates the refugees to encounter the living God in Christ.⁴⁷

3. Finally, the local church is able to provide a community for the displaced. Muslim refugees belong to collectivistic societies and they are dependent on their community for support during times of need.⁴⁸ It is devastating for refugees to have lost their homes and, in the process, not only their social support but also their sense of identity and who they are. If the church is able to get beyond the social hierarchies within the church and the attitude of being exclusive of all who do not belong to its community, the church can become a place where Muslim refugees can find community, be rooted, and carve a new identity in Christ, as part of His Body. The church needs to be inclusive, as Volf stated previously that God's welcome and inclusion of a 'hostile humanity into divine communion' is the model for Christians to relate to those who are outside the community of the church. It is through such inclusiveness that refugees can find healing and wholeness again.

⁴⁴ David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), p.200. (Italics added).

⁴⁵ Edward Rommen, *Come and See: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Contextualization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), XII.

⁴⁶ Rommen writes further. 'But in the case of the gospel, which is so clearly focused on an unmediated relationship between the risen, living, ever-present Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:20; 2Pet. 1:4) and the invitee, an indirect presentation via information will prove less than satisfying. Without an unmediated personal encounter there can be no reconciliation, no justification, no new life in Christ. So whatever it is, contextualization involves the mediation, not only of information about God, but the facilitation of a personal encounter with the saving, forgiving, all present, Lord of life, Jesus Christ.' Ibid, XII-XIII.

⁴⁷ It is important to note here that the objective of showing compassion is never to force conversion. Conversion is an internal human dynamic and not merely a process of changing social and religious groups. It is God who draws a person to Christ. John 6:44, 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.' Then it is the Holy Spirit who convicts the individual of sin. John 16:8 (NASB), 'And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.' Finally, it is God who seals the new believer with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13, 'And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.' While the individual has a choice of whether to believe God and accept the gift of new life, it is God who draws people to Himself to make them citizens of His Kingdom. Conversion as understood from Scripture is an experience that is much deeper and more profound that impacts the whole individual and is not just about joining a different religious group.

⁴⁸ See footnote 27 for Bruce Malina's description of collectivistic societies.

Conclusion

Why does God care for the displaced, the refugee, and the migrant? The starting place is to recognize that evil and sin are not just personal traits but are imbedded in our social and political institutions and values. This highlights our role as a society regarding why refugees are displaced and how they are treated. While the majority of refugees are like the poor, the displaced have lost their home and along with it all forms of social support and their identity in knowing who they are. The devastation that they experience dehumanizes them. This is not God's intention for any human being He has created and He is faithful to redeem and restore them as they turn to Him. The responsibilities of the church are to reach beyond its social and religious boundaries and embrace those who do not belong to their community. Such acts of compassion and inclusion then are the beginning of restoring dignity for the displaced and for them to carve a new identity and a home both physically and spiritually.

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